CD/PV.1368

Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand three hundred and sixty-eighth plenary meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Tuesday, 8 September 2015, at 3.10 p.m.

President: Ms. Katy Donnelly ..... (New Zealand)

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The President: I call to order the 1368th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

I hope you have now all received the amendments to the draft report of the Conference, which were issued as document CD/WP.591/Amend.1 (in English only), which you will have all found in your inboxes yesterday. I have also asked the secretariat to circulate a scanned copy of the document. We will discuss these amendments shortly and in formal mode. For today's formal plenary, the following delegations have requested to take the floor: China and Pakistan. I now give the floor to the representative of China, Ambassador Fu.

Mr. Fu Cong (*spoke in Chinese*): On 3 September, the Government of China held a solemn gathering in Beijing to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the victory in the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War. On that occasion, the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, delivered an important address.

In his address, President Xi Jinping pointed out that the experience of war makes people value peace all the more. The aim of our commemoration of the seventieth anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War is to bear history in mind, honour all those who laid down their lives, cherish peace and open up the future.

He emphasized that war is like a mirror. Looking at it helps us better appreciate the value of peace. Today, peace and development have become the prevailing trend, but the world is far from tranquil. War is the sword of Damocles that still hangs over humankind. We must learn the lessons of history and dedicate ourselves to peace. In the interest of peace, we need to foster a keen sense of a global community and shared future. Prejudice, discrimination, hatred and war can only cause disaster and suffering, while mutual respect, equality, peaceful development and common prosperity represent the right path to take. All countries should jointly uphold the international order and system underpinned by the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, build a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation and advance the noble cause of global peace and development. In the interest of peace, China will remain committed to peaceful development. We Chinese love peace. No matter how much stronger it may become, China will never seek hegemony or expansion. It will never inflict its past suffering on any other nation. The Chinese people are resolved to pursue friendly relations with all other countries, uphold the outcomes of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the World Anti-Fascist War and make a greater contribution to humankind.

In his address, President Xi Jinping announced that China will cut its military personnel by 300,000. This round of reductions in the armed forces will be completed by the end of 2017. This will be the eleventh time that China has voluntarily and unilaterally reduced its armed forces since the founding of the People's Republic. This amply demonstrates my country's sincere desire to work closely with other nations for peace, common development and shared prosperity. Together with the international community, we will make unflagging efforts to bring about the great vision of comprehensive and universal disarmament and lasting peace in the world.

The full text of the address given by President Xi Jinping has just been circulated by the secretariat.

The President: Thank you, Ambassador, for your statement. I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan, Ambassador Akram.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): As some of my colleagues are aware, I shall shortly be relinquishing my post here in Geneva and, as has been the practice, I would like to take this

opportunity to say a few words to bid farewell to my friends and colleagues in this room, and also to share some impressions after almost seven years of representing my country in the Conference on Disarmament. I am afraid I have no words of wisdom to break the deadlock that we are facing, but I think that the 7 years that I have spent now and the 3 years that I spent in the 1980s — which comes to almost 10 years of dealing with disarmament issues — gives me some sense of perspective. So I would like to share this perspective today.

I think that the first obvious reality that we have to acknowledge here in the Conference on Disarmament is that the 19-year deadlock that we are facing is a consequence of strategic realities. It is a consequence of the fact that the Conference does not operate in a vacuum and that national security interests of States are supreme, and that these national security interests guide our positions on various issues on our agenda. I do not agree with those among our colleagues who feel that changing the rules of procedure would somehow break this deadlock and would take us forward towards negotiating any issue or all issues on our agenda. We only need to look back to the conclusion of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, which were negotiated under the same rules of procedure. So, it is not the rules of procedure but strategic realities that we need to deal with. As such, the key to progress in the Conference actually lies outside the Conference. And this key is a part of the recognition that has existed for as long as we have had the outcome of the first special session on disarmament, which clearly established the principle of equal security for all. Does this mean that we are destined to be deadlocked forever? It may not necessarily be the case.

We have two options, I think. As long as the current strategic environment prevails, we could begin negotiations on items on our agenda that do not undermine or challenge the security interests of any member State of the Conference. I have said this several times in my statements in the past, but I think it bears saying again: that there are issues, at least in my view, on our agenda that fall into this category. The first and most obvious to my mind is negotiating negative security assurances. Given the existence of such unilateral and bilateral or multilateral assurances, it could even be a one-line treaty. Pakistan several years ago submitted a draft treaty for the Conference's consideration. We still abide by the draft of that treaty, and we are willing to negotiate such a treaty. But we are also willing to negotiate any other form of a legally binding instrument that would provide negative security assurances to non-nuclear-weapon States. Prevention of an arms race in outer space is another area, because outer space is a zone which is not yet a battlefield, not yet an arena of conflict, but potentially one that can and soon will be one. Perhaps it is in the interest of the international community to start negotiations on prevention of an arms race in outer space, and to do so in the Conference on Disarmament would seem to be the most logical venue.

Then there are other issues: radiological weapons is one such issue, an idea that was put forward by the Co-Chairs that we had, Australia and Ecuador, a year ago. We felt that it was an eminently reasonable proposal and deserved better and closer examination. Then there could be some new issues, again, issues that are not areas of competition as of now, or are areas of competition but not to the extent that we have fully integrated them into our defence systems and defence policies, although we are on the verge of doing that. In that sense, I am talking about cyberweapons and cybersecurity. That is another area which is worthy of closer consideration as a subject for negotiations. This is an idea that has been put forward by our Chinese colleagues: we have expressed our support for this idea, and we do so again at this time.

The other option, then, is to engage in substantive discussions on all agenda items in a balanced and equal manner. This is a process or an idea that we have pursued at least for the last two years and, at least in the opinion of my delegation, these substantive

discussions have proved to be extremely useful. And if I can once again recall my own experience of the 1980s when we were here in the Conference on Disarmament during the height of the cold war, we had four working groups; and when the global environment was conducive and after it changed, we moved very quickly towards negotiating a chemical weapons convention. But the years of discussing a chemical weapons convention in a working group proved to be extremely useful because many of the concepts, many of the basic ideas and approaches, including for verification purposes, had already been discussed in a very substantive manner. So, the point is that discussions may not be satisfactory for some delegations, but at least in my view, discussions of this nature have an important value because they can serve in the future as the building blocks for a treaty when the international community is ready to negotiate it.

I also appreciate the frustration of my friends, some of the delegations here, with the lack of negotiations and their strong feelings that the Conference on Disarmament is not fulfilling its mandate, and I agree with them. However, where I disagree is that the option or the alternative is not to abandon or shut down the Conference or undermine it in any way. The fact that several countries are already knocking at the Conference's door to join this forum underscores the continuing importance and salience of this forum. Secondly, the Conference is not the only organization or forum which is deadlocked. Just in this town, we have the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization, which are equally at an impasse. But in meetings at these organizations, I have not yet come across anyone who is suggesting that these organizations should be shut down or circumvented. So, I think that we need to be realistic and we need to realize that if we close the Conference on Disarmament down, pretty soon we would have to reinvent it and recreate it again.

The lesson of history, as I recall it in the context of the Chemical Weapons Convention, is that circumstances change. Realities change. And we are confronted, we are faced, we are able, when situations change, to find the ingredients for progress. This is also what happened with the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty for many years, an issue that was totally deadlocked. And then suddenly the circumstances were such that we were able to begin negotiations on this issue and conclude them in a fairly short time.

Going back to the Conference on Disarmament's deadlock, I think it is important that, not only here, but also outside this organization, this Conference, that the countries whose interests are directly affected by the issues on our agenda, and on which there is no agreement, negotiate. It is for these countries to seek strategic compromise and engage in efforts to address the security concerns that are creating these problems in the Conference on Disarmament. Admittedly this will take a long time, but in such matters of national security, it is wise to take a long-term perspective. There are no shortcut answers or short-term fixes in such situations. In the meantime, as I have said, we should create the building blocks through substantive discussions or agree on negotiating on any of the new issues that can lead to binding legal instruments. And finally, I think it would be extreme folly to scuttle the Conference on Disarmament.

In conclusion, allow me to thank all my colleagues and friends in this room, to thank my friends and my colleagues in the secretariat, and especially the Secretary-General, and of course, last but not least, the interpreters, who allow us and enable us to communicate with each other in a much more advanced and effective manner than we could have done otherwise. So, my thanks to all the interpreters for all their work over the last so many years that I have spoken in this forum.

The President: I thank the representative of Pakistan for his statement. Please allow me to pass on a message from my Ambassador, who has asked that I convey to you her very best wishes to you, Ambassador Akram, as you depart your posting, and to wish you all the very best for your forthcoming position.

Would any other delegation wish to take the floor? I see the Ambassador of India.

Mr. Varma (India): Madam President, since this is the first time that we have the opportunity and the pleasure to address the plenary under your presidency, let me take this opportunity to convey our very warm congratulations to New Zealand. We have greatly enjoyed the energy and purpose that New Zealand has brought to the work of the Conference on Disarmament, especially with respect to the ongoing work on the Conference's annual report. We are very pleased with the progress that has been made, and we look forward to an early, successful conclusion of these efforts next week. You can be assured of the full support of the delegation of India. We also attach importance to New Zealand, given its traditional support for the disarmament agenda. Your voice is heard with great respect in international forums, including in the Conference on Disarmament.

Madam President, we would like to take this opportunity to join you in bidding farewell to our colleague, Ambassador Akram of Pakistan, as he completes his tenure in Geneva and the departure that he intends to undertake from Geneva next month. We would like to convey that it has been a privilege and a pleasure to work with Ambassador Akram and his team. We have greatly benefited from the long years of his experience and expertise, and have had the pleasure of working with him and the delegation of Pakistan in the Conference on Disarmament, the Group of 21, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Biological Weapons Convention, the Convention on Chemical Weapons, and of course the First Committee. In bidding him farewell, we would like to convey to him and to his family very best wishes for all his future endeavours.

The President: I thank the representative of India for his statement and for the very kind words addressed to the Chair. I now recognize Ambassador Fu of China.

Mr. Fu Cong (China): I also wish to join others in expressing our sadness at seeing Ambassador Akram leave the Conference on Disarmament. Needless to say, my delegation shares many of the points that he mentioned today and in his previous interventions. As a great friend of Pakistan, the delegation of China wished to express our appreciation for Ambassador Akram's efforts in his years in the Conference on Disarmament. Ambassador Akram's experience and knowledge in disarmament affairs have always been a source of inspiration to me personally and to our delegation over the years. I take this opportunity to express our sadness and our appreciation for his cooperation with the delegation of China and with me personally. I wish him and his family well in his future endeavours.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Turkey.

Ms. Kasnakli (Turkey): Madam President, since it is the first time my delegation is taking the floor under your presidency in a formal setting, let me also congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency. You can count on my delegation's support.

I have taken the floor today to bid farewell to Ambassador Akram. Let me thank him for sharing his perspective on the Conference on Disarmament. It has always been a pleasure to work with him and to listen to his views on the various agenda items of the Conference. I would like to wish him and his family well in his future life.

The President: Would any other delegation wish to take the floor? That does not seem to be the case. I suggest that we adjourn the formal meeting for today. The next formal plenary will be held on Tuesday, 15 September, at 10 a.m. On that occasion, and as noted last week, we will hear from the Chair-elect of the First Committee, Ambassador Van Oosterom of the Netherlands. The list of speakers for next Tuesday also includes the Ambassador of Cuba.

This concludes our meeting for today. The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 3.30 p.m.

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